The New York Times
https://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/07/us/irs-settles-a-widow-s-lawsuit-over-the-suicide-of-her-husband.html

I.R.S. Settles a Widow's Lawsuit Over the Suicide of Her Husband

By The Associated Press

May 7, 1998

A woman who accused the Internal Revenue Service of driving her husband to suicide said today that the agency had agreed to settle her $1 million lawsuit by eliminating her tax debt of more than $400,000 and letting her keep her home.

''What happened to me could have happened to any taxpayer,'' said the woman, Shirley Barron. ''I hope my story will influence lawmakers.''

The Barron case, one of the first lawsuits filed under a 1996 amendment to the Taxpayers' Bill of Rights, was cited last fall during Senate hearings into abuses by the agency. The Senate is holding another round of hearings now.

Mrs. Barron's husband, Bruce, a 47-year-old lawyer, killed himself by carbon monoxide poisoning in his garage in 1996 after learning that a bank was foreclosing on the couple's home in Derry because the I.R.S. had placed a lien on it.

In a suicide note, he blamed the agency and the bank, saying they are ''bigger than me.'' He went on to write: ''One sits, does nothing, and watches you die. One needs to clear its books.''

At the time, the couple owed $330,000 in back taxes, penalties and interest.

After her husband's death, the agency continued to pursue Mrs. Barron. The agency seized her Cape Cod vacation home, wages and a retirement account, and placed liens against the life insurance benefits from her husband's death.

''When they decided to take everything I had, I decided to fight back against the most feared and loathsome agency in the United States,'' said Mrs. Barron, a librarian.

Last year, she filed what her lawyers said was the first-ever wrongful death lawsuit against the agency. The lawsuit claimed I.R.S. agents used illegal collection tactics.

Under the settlement, she agreed to drop her lawsuit and the agency agreed to drop its claim, which had reached more than $400,000 with penalties and interest, her lawyers said. The agency also agreed to pay her legal fees of $44,129, they said.

''We can't comment because there are strict tax privacy laws,'' a Justice Department spokeswoman, Christine DiBartolo, said.

Mrs. Barron said the agency had put her through ''sheer torture'' for the past five years.

The Barrons' tax troubles began when they lost an $80,000 investment in a recycling company in the 1980's. Their accountant said they could deduct it on their taxes, but the I.R.S. told them two years later they had to pay, and interest and penalties began mounting.

Mrs. Barron said the agency began forcing her husband's law clients to pay the agency directly, humiliating him and harming his business. She also said that her husband tried to negotiate a settlement but that the agency continued to pursue him.